

Two products ease manual writing

Writing a company's personnel policy manual requires legal expertise, good writing skills, and expertise in human resources. Fortunately, two recent products make this process easier.

These products are A Company Policy and Personnel Workbook from PSI Research and Personnel Policy Expert from KnowledgePoint.

The former costs \$33.95 for the workbook and \$39.95 for the companion software disk and can be obtained from PSI at 720 S. Hillview Drive, Milpitas, Calif. 95035. Personnel Policy Expert costs \$495; contact KnowledgePoint at 1311 Clegg St., Petaluma, Calif. 94952. Both handbooks will help you compile a personnel policy manual but their approaches are very different:

■ The more conventional of the two, A Company Policy and Personnel Workbook, is mainly a reference notebook of boilerplate policy examples.

Each page must be typed into a computer or, if the optional disk is purchased, assembled from com-



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puter files. In most cases there are alternative selections. You can modify as you please.

On the downside, while offering a substantial resource, this one requires a great deal of reading, digestion of material and manual manipulation of prewritten forms.

■ The Personnel Policy Expert, on the other hand, offers a far snazzier approach to writing personnel policy manuals.

This software program acts as your own personal human resources consultant. It asks you questions and responds as a consultant would.

This one uses a step-by-step, interactive dialogue with the user to fashion a fully written personnel manual.

To use Personnel Policy Expert

the user doesn't need computer proficiency. The manual is built, issue by issue, by answering on-screen questions from "point-and-shoot" menus. Sometimes the answers are "yes" or "no," other times they are a matter of degree. And before a question is posed, considerable background information is presented on screen.

Although the output from Personnel Policy Expert is essentially a series of prewritten statements strung together, there is ample opportunity for customizing. Any text that is selected for a particular manual can be edited, either with the built-in editor or an outside word processor.

Also, to facilitate a peer review process of draft versions of the manual, comments from each reviewer can be coupled with each part of the text. When it comes time to print, the comments can either be suppressed or included.

In a company where there is wide use of computers, a computer-generated policy manual such as Personnel Policy Expert could be maintained on-line.

This would greatly reduce printing and distribution costs and would ensure the most current version was always available.

While the first product, A Company Policy and Personnel Workbook, was prepared in 1987, the Personnel Policy Expert is much more current.

In fact, an updated subscription service is available for \$95 a year with all the latest rules and regulations. For example, a recent update provided wording on the topic of AIDS in the workplace.

On the downside, some management experts argue persuasively that having a personnel manual is a waste of time to prepare.

They say that a one or two page memo is all you need to state your company's key policies, and indeed, most small businesses do just that.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.